

# Pataki seeks permanent access to controversial power line

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UNIONDALE, N.Y. -- Claiming Connecticut's attorney general is engaging in "mindless parochialism" and using environmental concerns as an excuse, Gov. George Pataki and a cadre of officials called Thursday for permanent access to a controversial power line running under Long Island Sound.

"The problem is with the attorney general of Connecticut," Pataki said at a press conference in the offices of the Long Island Power Authority. "He is now urging that it be shut down right away and I just think that is the worst of parochial politics."

The governor was referring to a letter Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal sent U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham earlier this week, threatening legal action to shut down the 24-mile Cross Sound Cable. The power line runs between New Haven and the former Shoreham nuclear power plant on eastern Long Island.

"To me it's just mindless parochialism that really doesn't serve the interest of the people of Connecticut and doesn't serve the interest of the people of the region," Pataki said, noting that power also could be sent from Long Island to New England in an emergency.

The cable operates only with the consent of the Energy Secretary during emergencies because of environmental concerns; it does not meet the depth required in its permit of 48 feet below the surface of Long Island Sound and 6 feet below the seabed in seven spots covering about 700 feet.

Officials from the company that installed the line last year have said obstacles such as a rocky ledge and a tree stump are in the way.

Connecticut Gov. John G. Rowland said Wednesday the company still must meet Connecticut's environmental permitting laws. "Until they meet all requirements ... we're not going to turn it on," Rowland said, adding how he has "no problem" with the emergency order. "They need to follow it to completion."

Blumenthal on Thursday again vowed legal action "if the cable is activated continuously or permanently, which would clearly violate state and federal law. We do not expect federal officials to embark on such

an ill-advised, illegal course."

He added that the cable "is neither the cause nor solution to present power problems.

"Its capacity is minuscule compared to our overall needs, and we do a disservice to the citizens of both states by permitting the cable company to exploit the situation and distract us from the true task at hand."

During last week's blackout, Abraham approved the use of the cable, which was turned on last Friday afternoon and can be used until Sept. 1.

Energy Department spokeswoman Jeanne Lopatto said Thursday that the department is only authorized to approve the cable's use during emergencies. "If another emergency develops, we will reevaluate the situation, but for now the order stands as it is," she said.

Richard Kessel, the chairman of LIPA, and Pataki both contended that without access to the line's 330 megawatts of power, Long Islanders would have been subject to "rolling blackouts" as the utility worked to restore electricity to its 1.1 million customers. Kessel said Thursday that LIPA currently had adequate electricity from other sources and was not using the cable.

Blumenthal said in his letter that because the energy crisis was over in the Northeast, "There is no continuing factual or legal basis at all to maintain this order in place."

Pataki, who said he planned to speak with Abraham later Thursday, said that since a cause for the blackout has not been found, access must continue.

The Republican governor was joined by a bipartisan group of elected officials, business leaders and environmental advocates, including the Nassau and Suffolk county executives (Thomas Suozzi, a Democrat, and Robert Gaffney, a Republican, respectively), U.S. Reps. Peter King, a Republican, and Steve Israel, a Democrat.

Earlier this week, Sen. Charles Schumer, a Democrat, also wrote to Abraham seeking permanent access to the cable.

"Keeping the lights on is not a Republican vs. Democratic issue and it should not be a New York vs. Connecticut issue," said Israel. "We're not connected simply by a cross-sound cable, we're connected by a regional economy and it's time for Connecticut's officials to see the light."

Sara Meyland, executive director of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment, added: "All of the responsible agencies have reviewed the facts, and reviewed the cable and found that it does not represent a serious threat to the environment, so the environment is primarily been used as an excuse."

Pataki contended that the damage to the environment by "having to blast through bedrock to bury a cable beneath where it currently has no risk and no environmental consequences is anti-environment."

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